

# Chad

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## Freedom of the Press

Chad's media freedom environment remained restricted in 2013, amid the country's increasing international clout. Skyrocketing growth fueled by oil revenues has empowered the national government and strengthened the army, which is now one of Africa's best-equipped forces. Its military thus played a key role in international peacekeeping efforts in neighboring Mali and the Central African Republic in 2013. Chad was elected a nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council in October, and critics argue that Chad's improved diplomatic position has prompted some in the international community to tone down criticism of ongoing human rights violations and media restrictions.

Chad's constitution allows for freedom of expression and of the press, but authorities routinely use threats and legal prosecutions to curb critical reporting. A 2008 press law, Decree No. 5, increased the maximum penalty for false news and defamation to three years in prison and the maximum penalty for insulting the president to five years. Also in 2008, the High Council of Communication (HCC), Chad's media regulatory body, banned reporting on the activities of rebels and any other information that could harm national unity. Law No. 17 of 2010 abolished the prison sentences for defamation created by Decree No. 5, but introduced sentences of one to two years in prison and fines from \$2,000 to \$6,000 for inciting racial, ethnic, or religious hatred and "condoning violence." Despite the provisions of the law, a number of journalists were convicted for defamation during the year; the majority received suspended prison sentences. Blogger Jean Etienne Laokolé was arrested for defamation in March 2013 but released with a fine and three-year suspended prison sentence in August. In addition, magazine editor Juda Allahondoum was convicted of defamation in July, after officials brought a criminal defamation complaint in April. He was given a suspended prison sentence of six months.

Chad has no law establishing the right to access official information, and access remains difficult in practice.

Permission from the prosecutor's office, the HCC, and the Ministry of Commerce is required to establish a newspaper. Radio licenses are granted by the HCC, which is considered to be subject to strong influence by the government and is also said to monitor and control radio content. But the U.S.-based Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) did win a license to operate a radio station in February 2013, which features content from Voice of America and Radio Sawa, of the Middle Eastern Broadcasting Network. The licensing fee for commercial radio stations remains prohibitively high at 5 million CFA francs (\$9,800) per year. Officials periodically threaten to shut down media outlets or fine journalists for "irresponsible" reporting.

Officials said they foiled a coup attempt on May 1. The incident spurred a spate of arrests on suspicion of involvement, with those detained including at least two journalists. Eric Topona, secretary general of the Union of Chadian Journalists, was arrested and charged with defamation and "abortive conspiracy against the public order" on May 6 but released with a fine and a three-year suspended prison sentence on August 19. Prosecutors claimed that he had called for an uprising against the government. Magazine editor Moussaye Avenir de la Tchiré was also arrested on May 7 for inciting hatred, but released August 29 with a fine and suspended prison sentence of two years. According to Amnesty International, persons given suspended sentences are in a precarious legal position: they remain closely surveilled, subject to summons at any time by law enforcement, and may have their movements and activities restricted. They

can also be forced to serve out their sentence if convicted on new charges within five years, in addition to any new penalties.

Some reporters and editors practiced self-censorship to avoid reprisals, and impunity remained the norm for perpetrators of harassment against journalists. In February 2013, the editor in chief of the *Abba Garde* magazine was assaulted by armed men in police uniforms after being kidnapped and driven outside the capital. A group of men in military dress broke into the home of another editor from the same outlet three days later. He had fled an hour earlier after receiving news of threats to his safety, and the men threatened to kill the family members they found at home unless they disclosed his location. Both incidents were believed to be connected to the magazine's criticism of the government. In another incident of harassment that took place outside the country, Chadian blogger Makaila Nguébla, living in exile in Senegal, was expelled to Guinea after Chadian Minister of Justice Jean-Bernard Padaré visited Senegalese President Macky Sall.

The state-run Chad Press Agency is country's only news agency, and the government subsidizes the only daily newspaper, *Le Progrès*, in exchange for its support. It also owns the bi-weekly *L'Info*. While private periodicals—including the opposition-oriented *N'Djamena Bi-Hebdo* and *Abba Garde*—have an established readership in the capital, their impact is minimal in the largely illiterate rural interior. Some newspapers use printing facilities outside the country for financial reasons, and distribution is difficult due to poor infrastructure. There are two national television stations: the state-owned TeleTchad, and the private Al-Nassour, launched in 2011. The government does not interfere with the reception of popular foreign channels, such as Al-Jazeera and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Arabic. Radio is the primary means of mass communication, and apart from the state-owned Radiodiffusion Nationale Tchadienne, which operates several stations, there are over a dozen private and community-run stations on the air, many of which are owned by religious organizations. One new Arabic-language station was established in 2013.

Advertising is scarce, but it is the main source of revenue for media outlets, as government subsidies and other alternatives are even less reliable. Mobile phone access is low compared to other countries, with official figures citing 40 percent penetration. Internet access is also rare; 2013 saw only a miniscule rise in internet penetration from the previous year, to 2.3 percent. There are no reports that the government restricts access, but the internet infrastructure remains government owned.

## **2014 Scores**

### **Press Status**

Not Free

### **Press Freedom Score**

**(0 = best, 100 = worst)**

75

### **Legal Environment**

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

## **Political Environment**

**(0 = best, 40 = worst)**

31

## **Economic Environment**

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

22